

ON BIG JOY TRIP

Topekan in France Made a Long Tour in Auto.

Charles W. Leech Stayed in the Best Hotels.

WAS GREAT TO SLEEP ON BEDS

He Visited Monte Carlo and Famous Bath Houses.

Southern France Is Much Like California.

The horrors of war changed suddenly to the pleasures of the wealthy tourist for one "doughboy" from Topeka who is now in France. Charles W. Leech, a wagoner in Company C, 313th ammunition train, and the son of Frank Leech, marshal of the court of Topeka, has written a letter home to his family telling of an interesting trip taken by him and two men from his company into southern France at the expense of Uncle Sam. A few men were selected from various companies to make the trip, traveling first class and with "nothing to do till tomorrow," except see the country and enjoy themselves. Leech's letter follows: "Will say to begin with, that Nice is certainly a pretty city, and a very old and historic city. The climate is very moderate and similar to that of California. They raise tropical fruits, including oranges and lemons, but no grapefruit—at least I have not seen any. We have spent a very delightful week down here—a great change from regular army life. We are quartered in one of the best hotels in the city, and you can imagine us coming out of our quarters and stepping into a modern hotel with its Brussels carpets and crawling in beds after eight months of concrete floors and the soft sides of hard boards. It was just like awakening in Paradise. The hotel has a garden where the first night I landed between these sheets. I think I will have to write a book about the life of the States about the millionaire soldiers for one week. We sure have lived like millionaires.

Is Wonderful City. "Nice is built on the coast. It has wonderful palm trees and beautiful flowers. The buildings are all of white material with red tile roofs and their green foliage, make a very pretty picture. Also the old city of Nice is quite a city in itself, with its old buildings, palaces and old churches, which were built about the tenth century. The buildings in old Nice are from three to five stories high and the streets are very narrow—not over six or eight feet wide. One of the interesting places close to this old city is the street where they hold the public market every day. One can find here most anything he wishes to buy. At present they have oranges and lemons just ripening; and fresh vegetables—radishes, onions and tomatoes—in fact, everything that grows in the garden, and some things I never saw grow, so don't know what to call them.

"One of the most attractive places at this market is the flower row. Here one can find any kind of a rose one wants, as well as carnations, violets and pansies. Flowers are about the cheapest things they have and one can buy a beautiful bouquet of roses for a franc, or about eighteen cents in real money. The oranges are very high—three or four for a franc. Apples and pears are out of sight, good ones, bringing from five to seven francs each, or about \$1.25 to \$1.50 American money.

Butter Is High. "Butter is \$1.50 to \$1.75 a pound. Eggs are about the same per dozen and beef brings from \$1 a pound up. So you can see that living is rather high down here, as in all parts of France. But all our expenses are paid—except our sight-seeing trips, which we find quite expensive, but such a chance only presents itself once in a lifetime and I am sure taking advantage of it. As this is one of the very best leaves ever opened to the American soldiers in France and more especially at this time of the year. Not only Nice, but the whole of southern France is wonderful and I have seen it all—even went up into the Alps. "We also had a chance to land a foot on Italian soil and visited the little country of Monaco, which is under a separate principality; also the city of Monte Carlo, with its wonderful casino and where the mountains come right down to the water front, making a very beautiful picture. They have one of the finest bath houses in the world here.

Many Fine Mansions. "All along the beach from Nice to Menton are the mansions and palaces of great noblemen of all nationalities, where they come to spend the winter months. At the city of Monaco is located the prince's palace and some fine museums, including an oceanographic museum containing a valuable collection of sea specimens. "All cities are built either up among the rocks or on top of some of the lower hills, with the mountains as a background and as all the houses are white with red tile roofs it makes a remarkable picture. The Y. M. C. A. here at Nice has rented for the use of the enlisted men the casino, which is like a palace and took five years' hard labor to build. It is located about 100 yards out in the ocean and is one of the finest buildings of its kind in France. Here we find writing rooms and amusements of all kinds and the Y. M. C. A. serves us exquisite chocolate, coffee and sandwiches and stages vaudeville for us afternoons and evenings. "I don't know what we will do when we get back to the company again and have to take the old steering wheel of the 'Nack Quads. I'm afraid I will be going to spoil us for awhile, but we hope it won't be long until we are ordered to some port of embarkation. But if I thought I could make another trip in four months as nice as the one we have had this time, I wouldn't mind staying the other three months. As we are starting on our last month of overseas service we will soon be wearing gold service stripes. "I spent this afternoon at Ville, France, which has the finest harbor in the world and visited some of Uncle Sam's submarine chasers, which were quite interesting. They were a fleet of twenty-five in the harbor at Nice at present, but they are cruising back toward the States and expect to arrive there sometime in April or May."

Liberty Bonds bought; and sold. Shawnee Investment Co., 524 Kan. av. —Adv.

VALENTINE WEST SECRET AGENT

BY PERCY JAMES BREBNER

THE MAN WITH THE CARNATION.

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"YOU'RE a bit of a Bohemian, West." "Most men are," was the answer spoken somewhat boisterously. "I mean a bit added to the average," said Lauderdale. "I've found a place in Soho where they give you an excellent dinner at a ridiculous price, where you can rub shoulders with genius as yet unrecognized, and look at beauty, the real thing, not the kind that must wear an expensive frock to get it into the beauty class at all. Will you dine there with me tonight?" "It sounds attractive," West said. "Paris without the trouble of crossing the channel. Meet me at the Criterion, that will be handy for you. Seven o'clock." "Right."

They had met in Whitehall. Lauderdale was in the War-Office, and was returning from lunch; West had just left that building and was not in the best of tempers. Officialdom had become annoyed that he had not performed a miracle. A night off would do him good.

The place in Soho called itself Le Chien Rouge, and was not quite up to Lauderdale's eulogy. The genius was of the long-haired and rather dilapidated sort, and might never receive recognition nor deserve it, while the beauty was a little vulgar and unserved. Other men had discovered the place as well as Lauderdale, and had found it a very good start to an evening's frolic. Certainly the dinner was excellent, the entertainers above the average, and the sense of relaxation was rather pleasant.

"It will soon be spoiled," said Lauderdale; "but at present I like it. And it is rather amusing to speculate what the history of some of these people is."

"Most of them would be delighted to tell you if you asked, I fancy," said West. "Not the truth, perhaps, but something, probably, with a romantic note in it."

"I dare say; but I should back my imagination. Genius often travels a sordid road, and beauty, well, the way is fairly thorny for beauty as a rule."

"Didn't know you were a philosopher, Lauderdale."

"Live and learn, my dear chap. Now that girl at the table in the corner yonder, what's her history?" "By the way she has been watching us. I should say she would willingly change her place at the present moment."

"Feel up with her present company, eh. I don't wonder; still, I don't feel like that sort of entertainment this evening, do you?"

"Not a bit. I seldom do."

"We are birds of a feather, West. I like to watch the passing show and keep aloof from the crowd. This is the kind of place to meet some of the best people you are always after."

"You've been reading sensational fiction, Lauderdale."

"Not I. Life is quite sensational enough without that. We are full of it at the War-Office occasionally. We are at the present moment. There is a rumor going about that some plans of a quick-firing gun have disappeared. Heard anything about it?"

"He lowered his voice, but West glanced quickly round him. "Not quite the place to talk about it, is it?"

"No, I suppose not; but my word, West, you give yourself away. It is evident not only in fiction that such places as this are of interest to hunters of your game."

They lingered over their coffee and liqueurs, talking art, which was Lauderdale's hobby. The girl from the table in the corner smiled at them as she passed out with her companions. The room was emptying.

"I was speaking of prints just now," said Lauderdale. "If you are not keen on going to a show, what do you say to coming to my rooms and looking at some prints of mine. I have got a little hole over a shop off Oxford street. It is really rather jolly, and suits my pocket."

"Certainly I'll come. Theaters and music-halls are off just now. I have been having a round of them."

They helped each other on with their overcoats in the vestibule—Le Chien Rouge was deficient in service of this kind—and, going out, hailed a passing taxi.

Lauderdale's hole off Oxford street was cozy enough, but somewhat bizarre. The shop below sold second-hand furniture, and his sitting-room suggested that some of the pieces for sale had been stored here. There was no scheme or arrangement worth mentioning. The walls were covered with prints, mostly bad ones, West thought, but he was not quite certain enough of his knowledge to stop his companion's enthusiasm.

"A drink won't hurt us," said Lauderdale, "and you'll find these cigars quite good. There is a fellow in the

city gets them for me, and the price I suggest is a humbug somewhere. I don't believe they're paid duty."

"Very wrong, but it shall not prevent my sampling them," said West.

"See if that is to your liking," and Lauderdale passed him a whisky and soda. "And going back to the rumor of that quick-firing gun—by the way, you didn't say whether you had heard anything about it."

"No. Forgive me, but shop is the one thing I never allow myself to talk about."

"Quite right; but it is not my shop exactly, and I have a theory about the business," said it was a rumor, but you can take it from me, the plans have been stolen."

"And what is your theory?" "As it was with regard to the finding of these plans, that the War-Office seemed to expect Valentine West to work a miracle, he was inclined to listen to any theory."

"I get you interested, do I?" laughed Lauderdale. "That tells tales. My theory is this. Some fellow in the War-Office, having made up papers to look like the plans, watched for and got the opportunity of putting the sham in the place of the real."

"That is not a theory; that is the obvious."

"You have been thinking about it, then. What should you say if I could put my hand on the man?"

"Offer you a partnership in my job." "The reward is not big enough," said Lauderdale. "You think I am guessing; well, look here."

From an inner pocket he took an envelope, sealed and official looking.

"These are the plans, West. I am the man who took them."

"Is this a jest?" "No, just fact. More, I know you are after these plans, and should not be very surprised to hear that you have been talked to severely for not having put your hand on them before this. Look at the packet. It is sealed in a special way you will notice. You will know that it is genuine."

He threw it on the table and West took it up. The most casual glance convinced him that they were the lost plans. They were in a special envelope, specially sealed. He continued to examine the packet carefully, not because he had any doubt, but to have time to think.

"I am rather pleased with my cleverness," Lauderdale went on. "They consider themselves so abnormally smart in my place that it has been excellent sport opening their eyes to their fallibility. It took some doing. It was a brainy idea. The sham duplicate has deceived them for a day or two, and they are pulling every string they know to get that packet back, and Valentine West is on the job. It makes me laugh."

"A joke of this kind is no laughing matter, Lauderdale."

"That is because you lack imagination. I am out to explain the whole business to you. You will understand that packet would be a dangerous thing to leave about. I thought that point out carefully, and also the possibility of a search being made in my rooms, so for safety I have had a special pocket made in my coats. That was a good idea, not true, perhaps, but not generally adopted by fellows in the War-Office. Confess, now, you never suspected me, West."

"I never talk shop to any one."

"That is a very out quite unworthy of you," Lauderdale laughed. "He a sportsman and admit you have been done for once; that you have come against a man as smart as you are yourself. You can afford to confess because you have had a long run of success."

"I always admit my failures," said West. "We have not got to the end of this business yet."

"Very nearly we have. Bluff won't do; I happen to know the facts."

"Tell me what you are expecting me to do," said West. "You say this affair is not a jest, so I imagine you have repented and want me to shield you as much as I can."

"No, that is not the idea at all. I am going to sell those plans. You may wonder why I didn't get rid of them at once; well, the purchasers have only arrived in London today. The sale takes place tonight."

West was debating whether the man was a fool or a maniac, but did not jump to any hasty conclusion. The theft had shown great cunning and resource; perhaps a madman's cunning Lauderdale's present action seemed to be more of a practical joke, but it was not safe to take this for granted.

"You see, West, my rates are expensive, and in paying me for my services the government has not taken this fact into consideration," Lauderdale went on. "That is one point. Then there is another little fact which I would not have paid me to insist upon. I am Irish on my mother's side, closely connected with the Filligan family. You will remember the name. Some of them have suffered badly for exposing their opinions, so I am not very friendly with England on that account. I am out to get a little bit of the family's own back. That is why those plans are going to be sold to me."

"I do not think they are," said West, putting the envelope in his pocket. Lauderdale laughed.

"And I am going now."

Said Lauderdale, he put himself between the door and his companion and a moment later was looking down a revolver-barrel. Still he laughed.

"My dear West, I should have thought you would have been convinced by now that I am not a fool. That is an excellent revolver, but it is not the one you put into your pocket when you left home tonight. I made the exchange when I helped you on with your coat at Le Chien Rouge. Sleight-of-hand tricks have been a hobby with me for years, often as a turn in the cause of charity at suburban concerts. That revolver is loaded in every chamber, but with dud cartridges."

"Shooting is not the only way," said West, springing upon his companion. Lauderdale was a powerful man, and he was not taken by surprise.

"I think I should get the best of it in a rough and tumble," he said, "but I have sufficient respect for you not to take any chances."

He whistled. From an inner room came three men, the three who had been the companions of the girl at Le Chien Rouge.

"You are an observant fellow, West. So I need not introduce you," said Lauderdale. "I see you recognize my friends. The lady is not here. I am meeting her a little later for supper when our business is finished."

Valentine West snapped open the

he had handled stolen documents. "Good," he said. "We have done business together before, Mr. Lauderdale, and it was very satisfactory."

"You will be making West curious," was the answer. "He never talks shop. I will follow his example and not mention my enterprises."

"There is the money, Mr. Lauderdale, in notes. It is not necessary to count it. If there should be a mistake it can be rectified."

Lauderdale took the bundle of notes and thrust it into his pocket. "Into the inner secret pocket, West," he said. "It is quite safe. I suppose you are feeling pretty bad over this affair."

"I am sorry for you."

"Oh, drop that," was the answer with sudden savagery. "Bluff is no good with me. Under any circumstances you're the kind of man it does one good to get the better of. You're an American and too cocksure of yourself, and you annoy me. You are so fond of springing surprises on the people who employ you, and think yourself so darned clever, that you take mighty good care not to give yourself away beforehand. If you have ever suspected me, which I do not believe, I know perfectly well you wouldn't mention it. I know your methods. I have made it my business to study them rather closely. I shall turn up at Whitehall tomorrow without any fear. That surprises you, eh?"

"It does rather," and West spoke no more than the truth. He was beginning to have some respect for the completeness of this madman's scheme.

"You evidently trust Mr. Lauderdale."

"You are evidently convinced that I had no suspicion of you."

"I am dead sure of that or you wouldn't have entered the trap so easily."

"Then why should you be so anxious to make an end of me? It cannot be because I happen to be an American."

"Were you not instrumental in bringing a Filligan to the gallows? This is the payment. I haven't a shadow of regret. I go to supper; you—"

"Ah, speculation on that point puzzles you," said West. "I am glad I have the full explanation. In exchange I will give you one piece of advice. Don't go to Whitehall tomorrow; you'll regret it if you do."

"Bluff to the last?"

"No," said West. "If you are foolish enough to go, beware of the man with the carnation."

"Oh, go to the devil."

"I have to take another road," was the quiet retort.

Lauderdale went out, and as he did so one of the men went quickly toward the door to prevent West making an attempt at escape. The Frenchman with the packet still in his hand stood by the table.

"You are no coward, I'm sure, Mr. West. I regret that your death is necessary. Unfortunately I have no alternative. I am acting under instructions. The interests of the syndicate must be considered, and the promise given to Mr. Lauderdale is binding. Your death is part of the payment for these plans."

He produced a revolver and examined it.

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